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 Genesis 30:25-31:16

Sermon Outline

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: In the game Mafia, the mafia members undermine the work of the villagers to root out the mafia.
2. Need: We encounter foes who undermine our work.
 - a. Foes fail to follow design instructions.
 - b. Foes distract when we try to do spiritual work.
 - c. Foes disrupt our ministry plans.
3. Subject: How do we experience favor when we encounter foes that undermine our work?
4. Text: Genesis 30:24-31:16
5. Preview: We'll look at three types of work. Our foe's work. Our Work. God's Work.

BODY

- I. Foes work to undermine our work because of self-interest (30:25-36)
 - A. Laban undermines Jacob's work to earn a fair wage because of his self-interest (Gen 30:25-36)
 1. Laban deceived Jacob previously by swapping Rachel with Leah
 2. Laban promises to give Jacob the speckled, spotted, and black lambs, and the speckled and spotted sheep (30:25-34)
 3. But then culls Jacob's herd (30:35)
 - B. Acknowledge that foes will work to undermine our work. (I also may consider how develop maybe a theological point?)
 1. They focus on enriching themselves
 2. They focus on their reputation.
- II. We continue to work faithfully because the results belong to God (30:29-30, 32-33, 37-42).
 - A. Jacob continued to work faithfully to earn his wages by breeding sheep and goats.
 1. Jacob asks for a reasonable wage (30:29-30, 32)
 2. Jacob demonstrates his commitment to honest work by allowing Laban to inspect his flock (30:33)
 3. Jacob employs methods of the day to breed sheep for his wages (30:37-42)
 - B. We find it hard to work faithfully.

- III. God works to bestows favor upon us because he fulfills his promises to accomplish his purposes.
 - A. God's work enabled Jacob to breed the right sheep and goats.
 - 1. God intervened because of Laban's trickery (31:6-7)
 - 2. God transformed the flock into spotted or striped (31:8-9)
 - B. God instructed Jacob to return to home after fulfilling His promises to him.
 - 1. God provided Him children as promised (28:13)
 - 2. God gave to Jacob wealth that resembles Abraham and Isaac (24:35; 26:13-14; 30:43)
 - 3. God gives Jacob a call to return home that resembles Abraham's call (12:1-3; 31:3; 31:13-14)
 - C. Work faithfully with a trust in God.
- IV. (Work for God with God)
 - A. There is a gospel move. We should work faithfully entrusting our work to God. But we don't. We often try to take things into our hands when we encounter foes.
 - B. Jesus worked faithfully to teach others about the way to God. But people opposed this work. This opposition resulted in his death.
 - C. But God accomplished his purposes in Jesus even though it resulted in Jesus dying.

CONCLUSION

- 1. Summary: Foes work to undermine our work because of self-interest. We continue to work faithfully because the results belong to God. God works to bring about his purposes because he fulfills his purposes.
- 2. Closing Image: N/A

MANUSCRIPT

When I was in college, we often played a game called mafia. I'm not sure how many of you are familiar with the game. Let me share with you how the game works. Imagine there's a group of 13 people. They sit around in a large circle. Within the group, there are two types of people. Civilians and Mafia. A moderator assigns three people to be the mafia members. The rest of the people are civilians. The civilians win when they kill off all the mafia members. The mafia wins if they kill off the civilians. Each round consists of an evening and day. The first evening, the mafia reveals themselves to one another and then choose a civilian to kill off. This continues until either all the civilians or mafia members are killed off.

The game has been known to hurt relationships because the mafia works to undermine the civilian's efforts to identify the mafia members. Mafia members use deceit, charm, and persuasion to keep their identity hidden while influencing the civilians to kill one another off. Who you consider your friend might be your foe.

The game of Mafia reminds me of people we encounter at work. When I talk about work, I'm referring to different types of work. It could be your vocational work. What you do to earn a living. Or it could be your schoolwork.

In all these different areas of work, we may encounter foes who undermine our work. There exist people in our workplaces under the guise of being our co-workers, but they make our work difficult. Mafia members. Even as I am speaking, you can probably imagine these individuals. Their emails wait in your inbox. Your phone notifies you that they have left a voice mail for you. You can imagine their faces at last week's meeting. Their efforts cause you to fall out favor with your supervisors. They cause delays. It results in cost overruns. Work frustrations.

What do we do? **How do we experience favor when we encounter foes that undermine our work?** What action do we take when we face obstacles to our work so that we can experience blessing? How do we experience success in our work when we face opposition?

To answer this question, we'll turn our attention again to the story of Jacob found in the book of Genesis. This passage is found in Genesis, chapter 30. Please turn in your Bibles to **Genensis, chapter 30**. Genesis, chapter 30.

Before we get into this morning's passage, allow me to remind you of what has happened in Jacob's life thus far. Previously in Jacob's life... Jacob deceived his twin brother Esau twice to steal his birthright and his blessing.

This causes Jacob to flee from the promised land to the land of Haran. On his way to Haran, Jacob receives a vision from God. A ladder with angels going up and down it. God promises to bless Jacob and return him to the promised land. Jacob arrives in Haran. He works fourteen years for his uncle Laban to obtain his two wives: Rachel and Leah. God blesses Jacob with eleven sons. This catches us to this morning's passage in Genesis, chapter 30.

In this passage, **we'll look at three types of work.** Three kinds of work. Our foe's work. What do our opponents do? Our work. What kind of work should we produce? God's work. What does God do when we work. Three kinds of work. Our foe's work. Our work. God's work.

Let's look at the first type of work. **Foes work to undermine our work because of self-interest.** They are self-seeking. Self-serving. They look out only for their well-being. This attitude. This disposition causes them to erect obstacles to work. It causes them to oppose your labor. They add to your toil. **Foes work to undermine our work because of self-interest.**

The foe in our text is Laban. **Laban undermines Jacob's work to earn a fair wage because of his self-interest.** Laban looks out for his own well-being. His ego motivates his decisions.

We see this in Laban's behavior. Laban habitually deceives Jacob. For instance, **Laban deceived Jacob previously by swapping Rachel and Leah.**

Laban promises to give Rachel to Jacob after seven years of service. But on the wedding night, Laban replaces the beautiful Rachel with the weak-eyed Leah. Jacob wakes up. He turns over. He finds Leah. Not Rachel. Laban then tells Jacob: "If you want Rachel for your wife, then work another seven years for me."

Laban tricks Jacob again concerning his wages. Our passage begins with Laban offering to pay Jacob for his services. Look at verse 27. *But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you. Name your wages, and I will give it."* Laban promises to give Jacob the speckled, spotted, and black lambs, and the speckled and spotted sheep. Look at verse 31. *He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything, if you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages."* Look at Laban's response in verse 34. *Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said."*

But Laban culls Jacob's heard. He removes all the speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb. He removes the spotted and speckled among the goats. Look at verse 35. *But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, everyone that had white on it, and every lamb that was black and put them in the charge of his sons. And he set a distance of three day's journey between him and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock.*

Did you catch what is going on in the text? Jacobs asks to be paid for his services with speckled and spotted sheep, every black lamb, and every spotted and speckled among the goats. Whenever Jacob's flock gives birth to a speckled and spotted sheep, black lamb, or spotted and speckled goat, it belongs to Jacob. Now Laban didn't study genetics. But he knew that if I remove every speckled and spotted sheep, every black lamb, and every spotted and speckled goat, then there's no way that Jacob can breed those types of sheep and lamb. Jacob only has only white sheep. White sheep mate with white sheep produces white sheep.

To prevent Jacob's white sheep from mating with any striped, spotted, or speckled sheep and goats, Laban separates them with a distance that requires 3-days to traverse. If everything goes according to plan, then Jacob will work for Laban for nothing.

Self-interest motivates Laban. He grows his flock without needing to pay a shepherd. His wealth increases. He pays nothing.

We will experience Labans in our life. They are not called Laban. But they will be Laban like. Acknowledge that foes will work to undermine your work. They will take advantage of you. They will make it difficult for you to earn a wage.

Some focus on enriching themselves. Imagine you draw up a design schematic for a building. Your design requires a specific HVAC system to be installed. You go by the building to inspect it. You discover that the construction company installed a knock off instead of the brand you spec'd. You suspect that they chose the knock off so that they could pocket some of the money set aside for the correct system.

Or think about how you prescribe a certain medication for a patient. You know that this medication will treat the patient's illness. But the insurance company refuses to help cover its cost because it affects their bottom line.

Some people oppose your work to enrich yourselves. **Others hinder your work because they focus on building their reputation.** Imagine you're a PhD student doing research. But your doctoral advisor refuses to allow you to publish your research because he wants to keep you in his lab to help him finish some other research work for him. This other research will build his reputation.

Or imagine that you work at an engineering firm. You're on a team to design a new product to help monitor diabetes levels in people. But you see a design flaw in a new product. You bring it up to your supervisor. But your supervisor doesn't listen because he must get the product out to please his investors. If the investors don't see anything on the market, then the reputation of the company will take a hit.

You may face these types of people in your workplaces. But what do you do? How does it affect your work? This brings us to the second type of work. Our work.

We continue to work faithfully because the results belong to God.

Continue to labor with diligence. Persist in producing good work. Leave the outcome to God. Lay the effects of your toil at the feet of God. **We continue to work faithfully because the results belong to God.**

Let's turn our attention to another character of the narrative. The protagonist. Jacob. **Jacob continued to work faithfully to earn his wages by breeding sheep and goats.** How do we know that Jacob labored well? Let's look at a few details within the text.

First, **Jacob asks for a reasonable wage.** This shows a change in Jacob's character. Jacob deceived his brother Esau to steal his brother's birthright and blessing. But he won't take his uncle's sheep unless he earns it. Jacob offers to work for his wages. Look at their exchange in verse 31. *He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it.* During this time, a reasonable wage for a shepherd would be 20% of the flock produced. In other words, for every five sheep or goats born, the employed shepherd could take one for himself. But Jacob doesn't ask for 20% of the flock.

He asks for the speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats (30:32). Sheep normally come in white. Goats come in black and brown. Only the rare sheep have speckles and spots. Only the rare goat has spots and speckles. This means that Jacob asks for less than the going rate for a hired shepherd.

First reason why we know Jacob labors faithfully. Jacob asks for a reasonable wage. Second reason. **Jacob demonstrates honesty by allowing Laban to inspect his flock.** He invites Laban to audit his sheep and goats. Look at verse 33. *“So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Everyone that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen.”*

Laban agrees to the arrangement. Look at verse 34. *Laban said, “Good! Let it be as you have said.”* But I’m sure that the next day when Jacob examines his assigned flock, he notices something fishy. Uncle Laban is up to no good again. He took away all the multi-colored sheep. It resembles the time when Laban agreed to give Jacob Rachel as his wife but gave Jacob Leah instead.

Instead of confronting his uncle. Instead of employing force. Instead of taking justice into his own hands. Jacob makes the best of his situation.

Jacob employs the methods of the day to breed sheep for his wages.

In those days, shepherds believed that if the flock of goats and sheep saw a certain pattern when they mated, then they would breed offspring of that pattern. If the sheep and goats saw a striped sticks when they mated, they would produce striped offspring. Jacob employs this breeding strategy in the text.

Look at verse 37. Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. He set the sticks he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted.

Jacob models for us how one works faithfully even when foes undermine our work. We do what is appropriate. We ask for what is fair. We conduct our work honestly. We employ wise work practices to achieve the desired results.

But we don't always conduct our work in this way. **We find it hard to work faithfully.** Instead, we feed our frustrations. We think about how we've been wronged. What gives us the ability to work faithfully even when we face opposition?

This brings us to the third type of work. God's work. **God works to bestow favor upon us because he fulfils his promise to accomplish his purposes.** Even as we conduct our work, God is working. God labors. He toils. Whatever work God does, it will be in our favor. It will benefit us. Not only will it bless us, but it accomplishes his purposes. It achieves his plan. God works to carry out his designs. **God works to bestow favor upon us because he fulfils his promises to accomplish his purposes.**

Remember how Jacob bred the striped, the speckled, and spotted with the sticks with white streaks. Any shepherd today will tell you, sticks with white streaks will not help you breed striped, speckled, and spotted flocks. It's all in the genetics. Biology class teaches us this. What is going on? How was Jacob able to produce the right sheep and goats?

God. **God's work enabled Jacob to breed the right sheep and goats.** Jacob recognizes that Laban cheated him multiple times.

Laban cheated Jacob by giving him Leah instead of Rachel. Laban cheated Jacob by only giving him a monochrome flock instead his fair wage of multicolored animals. Jacob uses the number ten to describe the complete trickery of Laban. Look at chapter 31, verse 6. *You know that I have served your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times.*

This mistreatment of Jacob prompts God to step in. **God intervened because of Laban's trickery.** Listen to the second half of verse 6. *But God did not permit him to harm me.*

How did God intervene? **God transformed the flock into spotted or striped.** Look at verse 8. *If he said, 'The spotted shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped. Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.*

Moses uses some wordplay to show that God has given Jacob Laban's flock. The Hebrew word for spotted is "naqod". The Hebrew word for striped is "aqod". Both words sound like Jacob's name in Hebrew "ya'aqob".

A commentator believes that Moses employs these similar sounding words to say that God wrote Jacob's name all over Laban's flock.

Now we discover that Jacob's husbandry practices didn't produce the striped and speckled flock. God produced them through the questionable practice of using the peeled sticks.

By bestowing this favor upon Jacob. By producing this large flocks. By generating this wealth for Jacob. God has fulfilled his promises to Jacob. This prompts God to command Jacob to return home. **God instructed Jacob to return home after fulfilling his promises to him.**

To know God's promises to Jacob, you'll have to remember Jacob's vision of the ladder to heaven. After receiving this vision, God makes Jacob a promise. He says this: *"Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed."* (28:14)

First, God promises Jacob children. **God provided children** to both Rachel and Leah as **promised**. Together, they produced eleven sons. Benjamin will be born to Rachel later.

Second, God promises to give him wealth. Now there's no wealth explicitly mentioned in the promise I just read. But think about the phrase spread abroad. People need to spread out only when they obtain so much wealth that they need more land. Remember how God prospered Lot and Abraham with large flocks. The land couldn't hold their flock. This resulted them in going in separate ways. **God gave to Jacob a wealth that resembles Abraham and Isaac.**

Look at chapter 30, verse 43. *Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels, and donkeys.* This resembles Abraham's servant describing Abraham's wealth. Listen to what the servant says about Abraham. *He has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys (24:35).* This also resembles Moses's description of Isaac's wealth. Listen to what Moses writes earlier. *And the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants.* This wealth is a result of God's divine blessing in the life of Jacob.

After God has done these things, God will call Jacob to return to the land. Listen to what God said earlier as Jacob left the promised land. *Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.*

(28:15). Now listen to God's command after he fulfilled his promises to Jacob.

His command is found in chapter 31, verse 3. *Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you."*

God gives Jacob a call to return home that resembles Abraham's call. God

instructed Abraham to leave the land of Ur to go to a land that God would show Him. If Abraham decided to obey God, then Abraham would need to leave behind his family. But God would bless Him. But in Jacob's case, God instructs him to return home. Return to his family.

Through Jacob's faithful work, God fulfills his promise to bless him. But also, by blessing him, God enacts his plan to return Jacob to the promised land so that he can be a blessing to the nations. For through Jacob will come the savior of the world.

Now we should work faithfully by entrusting the results of work to God. But we don't always act this way. We decide then to employ sinful methods to get what we think what is right when we encounter our foes.

For instance, we think that when our foes oppose us, it gives us a right to chew them out. We discover that the contractor installed the wrong HVAC system. I'm going to call them up and give them a piece of my mind. You remove any type of verbal filter and let loose.

When you discover that the insurance company fails to approve medication for your patient, you take out your frustration on the insurance company's customer representative. You accuse them of being the reason for our broken health care system.

When your doctoral supervisor takes advantage of your labor, you grumble to other PhD students. You contribute to the low morale of your research group. You decide to post a Tic Toc video of your perceived injustice.

When your manager refuses to acknowledge a design error in an upcoming product, you decide to take to social media. You post on reddit and X how your company produces slipshod work. If they refuse to listen to you at work, then you decide to broadcast it to the world on the internet.

Consider this. What enabled Jacob to work faithfully for Laban even though he opposed his work? What gave Jacob the willpower to leave the results to God even though his mode of operation is to take things into his own hands?

Jacob experienced God's grace in his life. One example of this grace is that God decided to bless Jacob even though he deceived Esau twice. Another example of grace is God opening the wombs his wives and Rachel and Leah to bear children. Experiences of God's grace enabled Jacob to entrust his work to God.

For those of us who are Christian, we can also draw from that deep well of grace. We experienced God's salvation. Even though our sin separated us from God, God intervened by sending his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ died the death we deserve so that would receive his perfect life, which we do not deserve. If believe that God cares for us by dealing with our sin, then we can also believe that God will care for us in the work we do. Even when we face foes that undermine that work.

That means we must **work faithfully with a trust in God**. What does that look like? This means that we follow company protocol when we file a

complaint. If we discover that a contractor installed the wrong HVAC system, then we make an inquiry. We noticed that the schematic called for this system, but you installed a different system. Help me understand what happened. But if they decide to play sly, then you escalate situation.

If an insurance company refuses to cover a medication cost for your patient, then inquire what the insurance needs from you so that they would help with the cost. If you provide everything that the insurance company needs but they still refuse, then you follow whatever might be proper next steps.

If you sense that doctoral supervisor might be holding you hostage to help him publish, then talk to your doctoral supervisor about it. If they refuse to listen, then see if an academic counselor might provide you counsel on what to do next.

If your manager refuses to acknowledge a design flaw in an upcoming product, then a proper recourse is to report it to an ethics office. If the ethics office refuses to take the charge seriously, then you might need to do some soul searching. Do you want to be part of a firm that produces products with flaws in it?

For each of these situations not only should take the proper steps as allowed in your companies but also pray. Ask God for his help. Invited trusted friends to pray with you so that you might know what to do next.

Let's review again the three types of work. **Foes work to undermine our work because of self-interest. We continue to work faithfully because results belong to God. God works to bestow favor upon us because he fulfills his promises to accomplish his purposes.**

May the Spirit of God help us to work faithfully for God when we face opposition because God alone bestows favor upon his people.